

*News from the*

**U.S. Senate Committee on  
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**

**Michael B. Enzi (Wyoming), Chairman**



**For Immediate Release**

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**Tuesday, February 7, 2006**

**Enzi Announces 2006 HELP Committee Agenda**  
*Will Secure A Lifetime of Opportunity at School, Work and Home*

**Washington, D.C.** – U.S. Senator Mike Enzi, R-WY, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, today announced his legislative priorities for the second session of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, saying he will build on last year's cooperation across party lines to make progress on issues "close to home" for the majority of Americans: securing a lifetime of opportunity at school, at work and at home.

"We must be able to meet the 21<sup>st</sup> Century challenges of the American people at key stages in their life," Enzi said. "Our goal is to provide lifelong opportunities for people to be healthier, more competitive and more financially secure in school, at work and in retirement. Families are looking to us to provide real relief and sensible solutions to rising health care costs and strong growth in top-paying jobs and we plan to deliver."

The first session of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress marked an increased involvement by HELP's subcommittees to develop and move forward critical legislation, including major reauthorization bills from the "Higher Education Act Amendments," to the "Pension Security and Transparency Act."

Enzi praised the continued support and cooperation of the Committee's Ranking Member, Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) saying: "We simply could not have accomplished as much as we have without the cooperation of Senator Kennedy. He is vital in helping gather ideas on what the Committee can do to improve the situation in this country and translating that into meaningful legislation."

### ***Bioterrorism and Public Health***

During the coming year, Enzi said the HELP Committee will continue work toward legislation that provides a comprehensive plan to build up America's defense against biological and bioterrorist attacks. Enzi said he wants to encourage a viable and innovative industry to supply the country with the countermeasures, antidotes, and detection tools to ensure the safety of the American people.

"Though we've made remarkable strides to identify our nation's weaknesses, the fact remains that there are still holes in our biological defense that must be filled to ensure the safety of public health as well as national security," Enzi added. "Senator Richard Burr (R-NC) and I are committed to making this mission the number one priority of the Subcommittee on Bioterrorism and Public Health Preparedness."

### ***Health Care: Providing Affordable, Accessible Care***

To ease rising health insurance costs, Enzi said he is working to bring to the Senate floor the "Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act" (S.1955) a bill that will increase the ability of small businesses to offer health insurance for their employees while promoting market reforms that also will benefit all Americans unable to obtain group health insurance.

"We are nearing almost six years of double-digit growth in health insurance premiums," Enzi said. "This inflationary spiral is lowering the quality of life for countless families and hurting our economy. Those hardest hit are America's small businesses and families outside of employer-provided insurance. Never before has there been a more urgent need to pass sensible health insurance legislation."

In addition, Enzi is a key advocate of legislation to bring revolutionary information technology to health care as provided for in the "Health Information Technology Act," (S.1418), which the Senate passed last year.

"The Health IT Act will bring us closer to enabling all Americans the freedom and security of going to the doctor's office or hospital and presenting an electronic card or identification tag that holds all patient data, insurance and medical history records. This legislation will lay the foundation for technology and information sharing among doctors, hospitals, and insurers," Enzi said. "This revolutionary technology would improve patient care by reducing medical errors and allowing for a more efficient record keeping to help save lives."

Enzi said he is working with leaders in the House of Representatives to push for passage of Health IT legislation through the House.

### ***Education: Key to a Competitive Workforce***

Echoing the President Bush's agenda, laid out in the State of the Union, for providing Americans with the educational tools they need to remain competitive on the world stage and find good jobs, Enzi said: "Our mission to secure a lifetime of opportunity at school, at work and at home begins with providing an educational system that will support lifelong learning, training, and retraining for Americans."

Under Enzi's leadership, the HELP Committee laid a foundation to boost the competitiveness of American workers during the first session with passage of "The Higher Education Amendments Act of 2005" (HEA) as well as the "Workforce Investment Act" (WIA) S.1021. Those important bills will help retain America's competitive edge in the global economy by ensuring that higher education prepares today's students for the demands of tomorrow's workplace. "Every day global competitiveness places more demands on productivity in the American workplace," Enzi said."

Working in conjunction with HEA and WIA, the Perkins Act, S. 250, will require state agencies to work together on identifying the needs of the workforce and in designing job and skills training programs to match those needs. "Reauthorizing the Perkins Act will help strengthen our workforce and enable America to compete and succeed in the global economy," Enzi said. "The Perkins Act is a critical piece of a comprehensive effort to train American workers to fill the good jobs being created."

### ***Workplace Safety: Achieving Fairness and Cooperation***

To provide American workers and employers a more logical and fair approach to workplace safety, Enzi said he has introduced three reform bills and is working to bring them to the Committee for action: "The Partnership Act," S.2065, "The Fairness Act," S. 2066, and "The HazCom Simplification Act," S. 2067. The bills are a legislative package to expand partnerships between OSHA and the nation's business community to combat workplace injuries that plague about 4 million workers each year.

"Our primary responsibility is to insure a safer and more healthful workplace. We cannot simply inspect or fine our way to safety," Enzi said. "We need policies and practices that encourage voluntary compliance, foster better understanding of safety issues and increase cooperation between OSHA and the employer community, particularly where small businesses are concerned."

In light of the recent tragedies in the coal mines of West Virginia, Enzi said he will also thoroughly investigate how new technologies can be developed to improve radio communications between mine workers, rescue teams, and officials above ground and how technology can help extend the supplies of life saving oxygen miners rely on following an explosion or cave-ins. He has pledged to hold an oversight hearing into

mine safety procedures and enforcement measures next month prior to introducing new mine safety legislation.

***Retirement Security: Providing a Stable Retirement with Health, Choice and Opportunity***

Securing the retirement benefits of millions of Americans is a top priority for Enzi, and he is looking forward to passing the “The Pension Security and Transparency Act” out of conference committee early this year and getting it to the President’s desk for signing. S.1783 is a compromise struck by the HELP Committee and the Senate Finance Committee designed to ensure that pension plans are properly funded and that the retirement funds of an estimated 43.5 million Americans - covered by both single employer and multiemployer plans - are secure. Moreover, the bill will strengthen the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation’s (PBGC) ability to safeguard financially troubled plans by requiring increased premiums be paid to the PBGC.

“Hard-working Americans who spend a lifetime earning their pensions deserve to reap the benefits they were promised in retirement,” Enzi said. “Our current system amounts to a file drawer of IOUs, leaving too many Americans at risk. The ‘Pensions Security and Transparency Act’ strikes a reasonable balance between the financial needs of retirees and the financial resources of the employers funding their pension plans. It is a victory for employees - young and old, and employers - large and small.”

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